

# More support needed to make shopping easier for people with intellectual disabilities

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Better support can greatly improve the supermarket shopping experience for people with intellectual (learning) disabilities, a study by an independent self-advocacy group reveals.

The research, reported in the journal *Learning Disability Practice*, has generated a list of recommendations which are being sent to leading [supermarket chains](#).

The York People First self-advocacy group, an independent body run by and for people with intellectual disabilities, joined forces with eight final-year occupational therapy undergraduates to study the challenges experienced in the aisles.

Focus groups and questionnaires examined the reasons for shopping trips, the experience in stores, paying at tills, and the feelings afterwards.

Shopping was found to make a valued contribution to the weekly routine of people with intellectual disabilities, both for leisure and self-care needs, with use of in-store cafes proving particularly popular.

People in the study experienced problems with signage, small writing on packaging, queueing and manoeuvring trolleys down the aisles.

But they also reported issues with the negative attitudes of other shoppers, inadequate numbers of supermarket staff to offer on-the-spot assistance, and issues with carers doing too much for them.

The study highlighted the need for support staff to resist the temptation to do everything for shoppers in their care, as it undermined independence and prevented them learning the skills to cope on their own.

People with intellectual disabilities also reported issues understanding money and budgeting, challenges using transport to and from the supermarket, and problems coping when stores were very busy.

Recommendations include dedicated tills for those needing additional support; better signage, such as colour-coded aisles and food symbols as well as text; an accessible picture map at the helpdesk; and information on packaging about storing and preparing the product.

The report called for 'easily identifiable happy-to-help staff who have appropriate training and skills to support people with additional needs' and appealed to supermarkets to include communicating with shoppers with intellectual disabilities in their general staff training sessions.

Supermarkets are also being approached to see if people with intellectual disabilities could be given more opportunities to be mystery shoppers.

**More information:** "Shopping experiences of people with learning disabilities." *Learning Disability Practice*. 18, 8, 16-21, [dx.doi.org/10.7748/ldp.18.8.16.e1677](https://dx.doi.org/10.7748/ldp.18.8.16.e1677)

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